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Protracted conflicts in the GUAM area and their implications for international peace, security and development

Letter dated 7 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit the statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia dated 7 March 2008 regarding the recent developments in the conflict settlement process in Abkhazia, Georgia (see annex).

I should be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 16.

(*Signed*) Irakli **Alasania**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 7 March 2008 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia*

7 March 2008

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia expresses its extreme concern over the Russian Federation's withdrawal from the 19 January 1996 decision of the CIS Council of Heads of State on measures aimed at settling the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, on which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation sent an official note on 6 March 2008 to the Executive Committee of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

This step can be assessed in no other terms but as an overt attempt to infringe Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and an extremely dangerous provocation aimed at abetting separatism and escalating tension in the conflict zone.

Any attempt to justify this decision by an alleged progress in the process of return of internally displaced persons goes beyond the scope of morals, given the fact that as a result of ethnic cleansing conducted by Abkhazia's de facto authorities — as recognized by OSCE summits in Budapest (1994), Lisbon (1996) and Istanbul (1999) — hundreds of thousands of people are still deprived of the right to return to their homes and their property is disposed illegally, mainly to citizens of the Russian Federation.

We seek to focus the international community's attention on the alarming fact that, by withdrawing from the above-mentioned decision, Russia considers itself no longer bound by the obligation to prevent sale and supply to the Abkhazian side of all kinds of armaments, defence equipment and spare parts, ammunitions, armoured vehicles and equipment (paragraph 3); as well as to prevent the hiring of its own citizens and their enrolment in any armed group in the conflict zone (paragraph 5a).

We regret to state that the main motive for taking such a decision is the Russian side's evasion of this highly important responsibility rather than removal of economic or humanitarian restrictions, which, in actual practice, the Russian side has long been ignoring. By withdrawing unilaterally from these obligations, Russia creates the basis for providing the separatist government with military assistance and establishing its military presence in Abkhazia.

Proceeding from the foregoing, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia maintains that the Russian Federation's withdrawal from the 19 January 1996 decision of the CIS Council of Heads of State creates a serious threat of destabilization, substantially alters the situation around the conflict and undermines the legal framework, which determines the peace format of CIS in the conflict zone. Everyone needs to be reminded that it is within this very format that Russian peacekeepers operate in the conflict zone. It is also worth noting that this decision of Russia coincides with separatists' provocative acts and their intense military build-up.

* Also circulated under the symbol S/2008/167.

In the situation that has emerged, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia holds the Russian Federation fully responsible for any possible development of events. At the same time, Georgia retains the right to undertake adequate actions under the Constitution and legislation of Georgia and international law to ensure protection of its own national interests.